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ABSTRACT

An ethnographic study was conducted in an elementary school in order to understand the relationship between teacher behavior and the environments of classes identified by teachers as their "worst." First, research on teacher behaviors was reviewed to identify a set of factors identifiable with effective and ineffective teaching. Ten dimensions of teacher behavior were identified: maintaining time on task; feedback; grouping; praise; questioning and wait time; structuring; student choice; warmth; task-oriented, business-like behavior; and teacher expectancy. Eleven classes described by teachers as their "worst class" were observed. The presence of less effective teacher behaviors in these classes was verified. The less effective behaviors occurring at the highest frequency were associated with these dimensions: maintaining on-task behavior; warmth; task-oriented/business-like environment; and teacher expectancy. (KH)

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AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF LESS EFFECTIVE TEACHER BEHAVIORS AS THEY RELATE TO THE WORST CLASS SYNDROME

by

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This paper is submitted to
Drs. Virginia Koehler and Joseph McCaleb
in fulfillment of the requirements for the course
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I. Evaluation of the Problem

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the relationship between teacher behaviors identified in research of the past twenty years to behaviors demonstrated in classrooms identified by the teacher as their "worst" class.

The impetus for this research began as a result of my paper "Ethnography of the Worst Class Syndrome" which was concerned only with other than teacher factors and the incidence or likelihood of those factors contributing to a class being identified by its teacher as his/her worst class. That research identified six factors. They were the number of remedial readers in a class; the ratio of males to females in the class; the incidence of level four (low level) classes; the number of repeaters in a class; a large number of repeaters who are simultaneously taking two or more sequential courses in the same subjects; and finally, the period of the day in which the class actually occurs. This paper now focuses on the teacher. Specific behaviors demonstrated by teachers in classes they have selected as their worst will be identified and the relationship between a "worst class" and less effective teaching behaviors will be made.

II. Related Research

In his article "Twin Dimensions of Teacher Behavior Assessment" (1973), Stan Dropkin refers to several models of providing assessment of teacher behaviors. The first, Medley and Mitzel's model, identifies seven behaviors and the percentage of occurrence of these behaviors needed to produce the best learning environment. The seven behaviors were Controlling Functions, Imposition Facilitating, Content Development, Personal Response, Positive Affectivity and Negative Affectivity, with varying percentages of occurrence depending on whether or not they found the behavior to be an attribute to a learning

environment.[1]

Jerome Bruner's study is another that Dropkin discusses that presents criteria for teacher competence. Those criteria include the establishment of a disposition toward learning, the development of an optimal structure for learning, presenting the material in sequence and the use of reward and punishment to encourage learning. These provide respectively seven and four categories of teacher behavior.[2]

Soar, Medley, and Coker state in "Teacher Evaluation: A Critique of Currently Used Methods" that invalid, unreliable evaluation techniques cause injustice and that "teacher's resistance to evaluation is reasonable if that evaluation is subjective, unreliable, open to bias, closed to public scrutiny, and based on irrelevancies."[3] Therefore to be as specific as possible in the identification of behaviors and in the definition of those behaviors was my goal.

The teacher characteristic and "good teacher" concepts of the 1960's and 1970's were thusly lacking. It was process-product research that provided the focus on what the teacher was doing (process) in direct relationship to student achievement gains (product), with the latter being the accepted goal in education.

For the purposes of this ethnographic study I therefore chose to go beyond Medley and Mitzel and Jerome Bruner's et al categorizing of behavior. More specifically delineated behaviors which support the premise of those categories are provided by BTES and are further delineated by Graham and Heimerer (1981) and therefore are the tools upon which I base my study.

III. Field Work Methods

I began my research for this paper by observing classes of the seven teachers whose classes in "Ethnography of the Worst Class Syndrome" had been identified as their "worst class". During these observations, I had a list of Graham and Heimerer's ten Dimensions for More Effective Teaching and ten Dimensions for Less Effective Teaching; each dimension with its breakdown of specific behaviors. I numbered the teaching behaviors of the "More Effective" list and lettered the behaviors of the "Less Effective" list. I gave each behavior a separate number or letter. There were two exceptions. The six behaviors identified with "clarity" in the structuring dimension for more effective teaching were all given the same number because I felt that "clarity of structure" was an overall dimension incorporating all or most of those behaviors and therefore should be judged in its entirety; also, the seven different examples of less effective teaching behaviors associated with the "Warmth" dimension were assigned one letter because they were all examples of negative verbal statements and would be easily identified by an observer as such. The result was that there were an equal number of behaviors for More Effective Teaching and Less Effective Teaching although the number of behaviors varied on the two charts for each dimension. The following is my key.

Dimension		Behavior of More Effective Teaching
1. Maintaining On-Task Behavior	1	order flexible
	2	not threatening close monitoring
	3	students have own materials
	4	clear goal, direction
	5	logical build-up
2. Feedback	6	immediate
	7	non-evaluative
	8	task relevant
	9	include correct answer and how it is arrived at
3. Grouping	10	large group/whole class
	11	close supervision
4. Praise	12	sparing
	13	only associated with work, not behavior generally only given when approached by student
5. a. Questioning	14	lower order (recall and factual)
b. Wait Time	15	less wait time (3 seconds or less)
6. Structuring	16	clarity: reviewing stating objectives outlining lesson content signaling transition emphasizing important points summarizing
7. Student Choice	17	few student choices structured learning
	18	use of textbooks and workbooks
	19	teacher does most of talking
8. Warmth	20	student knows help is available humane and genuine interaction when student learning is the goal, warmth is not so important as cognitive process
9. Task Oriented/Business-Like Behavior	21	promptness in beginning and ending activities by the clock - not student interest
	22	emphasis on objectives and content coverage

CHART #1 (cont'd)

Dimension		Behavior of MORE Effective Teaching
10. Teacher Expectancy	23	assigning more homework
	24	paced move through curriculum spends more time actually teaching curriculum materials

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CHART #2

Dimension		Behavior of LESS Effective Teaching
1. Maintaining On-Task Behavior	a	behavioral warnings alertings, criticisms
	b	accountability messages
	c	students must wait for materials
	d	students practice something they already know
	e	students unaware of what to do if they get stalled and have to wait for teacher
2. Feedback	f	neutral verbal comment
	g	no explanation as to right/wrong
	h	more information about process than the answer
	i	ask students to elaborate about response
3. Grouping	j	small groups little monitoring
4. Praise	k	high amount of praise praise about behavior
	l	going to the student rather than waiting for the student to come to the teacher
5. a. Questioning	m	higher order questioning
b. Wait Time	n	more wait time (3 or more seconds)
6. Structuring	o	ambiguous, unclear directions sutdents unsure of what to do
7. Student Choice	p	unstructured
	q	much student input
	r	no textbook/workbook

CHART #2 (cont'd)

Dimension		Behavior of LESS Effective Teaching
8. Warmth	s	high warmth in comparison to cognitive process
	t	belittling shaming sarcasm criticism shouting scolding ridiculing
9. Task Oriented/Business-Like Behavior	u	flexible classrooms, i.e., structure
	v	student interest and involvement as determined by the beginning and ending of activities no emphasis on objectives, or contents covered
10. Teacher Expectancy	w	no homework
	x	slow pace through curriculum emphasize learning and practice

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I also made a chart listing, across the top of a page, the ten Dimensions of More/Less Effective Teaching. I made columns under each dimension. As I observed a class I would record on the "Dimensions Only" chart the behaviors I witnessed. Referring to the "Numbered/Lettered - More Effective/Less Effective Behavior Chart", I would record the number or letter I saw demonstrated under its particular dimension. The following is the result of utilizing that procedure for two observations.

ON TASK	FEEDBACK	GROUPING	PRAISE	QUESTION-ING	STRUCTUR-ING	STUDENT CHOICE	WARMTH	TASK ORIENTED/ BUSINESS-LIKE	TEACHER EXPECTAN-CY	OBSERVA TION
a e	g f	10				q	t sarcasm	21, 22	24	b h
a 1 2	6 7 8	10						21, 22		b r

I quickly realized that for many reasons this was not an appropriate method of analyzing behaviors. It reflects the often currently used low inference technique of observations. Also, it was providing limited information in that it was identifying which behaviors were occuring but did not illustrate what actually ~~what~~ went on in that classroom that warranted a particular bevahior to be noted.

I realized I could chart the same information if I wrote protocols of my observations and from the protocols, identify which behaviors were being demonstrated. I would then have in hand a descriptive qualitative analysis as well as a quantative analysis. This was the procedure I then used.

I observed eleven classes of seven different teachers. One teacher, because of the nature of the class, I observed three times; and another teacher I observed twice. Four different subject areas were included. They were English, Social Studies, Science, and Math. The grade level varied from class to class and also within classes from grades 9 through 12.

From these eleven protocols, teacher behaviors were first identified as separate from student behavior. I then identified on the protocol which, if any, of the ten dimensions of less effective teaching applied to each example of teacher behavior. If a specific behavior of that dimension was demonstrated, that was recorded also. After completing these notations for teacher behaviors on all eleven protocols, I then drew a chart listing the ten dimensions across the top and the numbers 1-11 down the left side which represented each of the eleven protocols in random order. I then went through each protocol and noted for each protocol which dimension and more specifically, which behaviors had been demonstrated. This resulted in an immediate visual presentation of the frequency of occurrence of the various dimensions and their corresponding behaviors in the eleven protocol observations of the classes selected by seven teachers as their "worst class".

ON TASK	FEEDBACK	GROUPING	PRAISE	QUESTIONING	STRUCTURING	STUDENT CHOICE	WARMTH	TASK ORIENTED/ BUSINESS-LIKE	TEACHER EXPECTANCY	OBSERVATION
1		1				qqqq pp	sarcasm sarcasm	1 suuuu vv		
bb	fg						ttt-scolding t ridicule t sarcasm		1 1	
a b					o			uv uv uv		
a b c	g				6 o	p	t scolding t sarcasm t sarcasm	9		
aa	fg							v	4	
a							t sarcasm t sarcasm t belittling sarcasm t sarcasm			
aaa aa	gg					p	t sarcasm t sarcasm t belittling t sarcasm t sarcasm sarcasm sarcasm t scolding t belittling	vvvv 9 uuu		
ba				f	o	p	t scolding t shaming criticism t ridicule			
aaba	g	1 little monitoring			o	p		1 vvv u		
	bb, gg				o	p u	t	vvv u		

I then distributed the list of ten dimensions with their respective less effective teacher behaviors to the seven teachers whom I had observed. I asked them to identify, providing anecdotes and examples where possible, which of these behaviors they recognized being demonstrated by themselves during the class they selected as their "worst class". I asked them to anonymously return their sheets to me via school mail.

Using a chart constructed on the same premise as the previous one on which I plotted the teacher behaviors which I had observed during the eleven protocols, I now plotted the teachers' responses about themselves. This, too, provided an immediate visual presentation of the frequency of various behaviors, thus providing me with two perceptions relating less effective teacher behaviors with classes identified by seven teachers as their "worst".

Entry to acquiring this information was simple. The seven teachers with whom I was working were the same seven who had cooperated in my preceeding study "Ethnography of the Worst Class Syndrome". It was imperative to this study that I use the same seven because their classes had already been identified through different perspectives, as their "worst" class and each class had contributed to the determination of "other than teacher" factors as it being a worst class. Now I wanted to see if, in addition to "other factors", the teacher's behavior, too, was a factor. Each teacher understood this as the goal and very willingly supplied information. Seven teachers cooperated in allowing me to make the eleven observations, and six of those teachers followed up in returning their self-identification of demonstrated behaviors.

Throughout this paper, in the analysis of data, the term "frequently occurring" is used. This can be defined as responses and/or observations indicating a "clustering" or majority of noted incidents of a particular dimension or behavior in comparison to other noted responses and/or observations.

ON TASK	FEEDBACK	GROUPING	PRAISE	QUESTION-ING	STRUCTUR-ING	STUDENT CHOICE	WARMTH	TASK ORIENTED/ BUSINESS-LIKE	TEACHER EXPECTAN-CY	OBSERVA-TION
1. a b	i									- 3
2. a b d	f		l			q			w	- 7
3. a b	i			n				u v	w x	- 8
4. a d	h	j	l		o		t shouting shaming		w x	- 9
5. a e	i f		l		o		t sarcasm criticism		x	- 8
6. a b d	h		l	n			t shaming criticism shouting scolding		w x	- 9

It is clear from the charts on pages 9 and 11 that both my protocol observations and the teachers' own self-evaluations indicate the presence of less effective teacher behaviors being demonstrated in those classes identified as a "worst class". Further analysis of those charts emphasizes select dimensions of less effective teaching behaviors occurring at a higher frequency than others. Each source, the self-evaluations as well as my observations, indicate three dimensions of high frequency. Two of the three dimensions are the same for each source. From the teachers' responses as well as from my observations, "Maintaining On-Task Behavior" and "Warmth" have been identified as two frequently occurring dimensions in which less effective behaviors are very heavily clustered.

Each of the ten dimensions was identified by at least one teacher. The six teachers, who each had a possible 24 less effective behaviors from all ten dimensions to selct from for a total possible of 144 examples of less effective behaviors occurring, did in fact select 44 as a total. This averaged 7.33 less effective behaviors per teacher. The behaviors teachers did <u>not</u> identify at all as occurring in their classes were "c" - that students had to wait for materials; "g" - no explanation as to right or wrong answers; "k" - high amount of praise; "m" - use of higher order questioning; "p" - unstructured; "r" - no textbook/workbook; and "s" - high warmth in comparison to cognitive process.

Additionally, teachers have identified "Teacher Expectancy" as a frequently occurring less effective dimension. That prevented my ability to evaluate "Teacher Expectancy" satisfactorily and is no doubt why only the teachers, but not I, identified it as a frequently occurring less effective behavior and that my observations, due to my own teaching schedule, were not for the length of the entire period. Most often I was present for the beginning of a class and remained for 20-25 minutes (which is half of a period).

Therefore, I was not present for the conclusions of classes which is normally the time during which homework is assigned. Five out of six teachers identified this demension and four out of five of them selected the behavior of assigning no homework as their reason for identifying this less effective dimension as occurring in their class.

> "I walked into the room and the lights were out although the teacher and some of the other students were in the room. One student asked 'Why aren't the lights on?' The teacher says 'Someone turned them out last period.' Boys begin to enter and hit each other on the head. Kids wandered around. The teacher says 'Anyone NOT in your seat when the bell rings goes to the office.' Someone says 'Shit... something'. The teacher says ' I heard your bad mouth yesterday.' One boy walks in - sitting down when the bell rings. The teacher says 'Go to the office Joe.' Joe says 'What for?' 'After that mouthing back you gave me yesterday, you're lucky you don't get a referral.'

This is part of my transcription from a protocol of the opening of a Business Math class. It exemplifies those less effective behaviors of "Maintaining On-Task Behavior."

As stated previously, the less effective behaviors occurring at the highest frequency as identified by both the teachers' self-evaluations and my eleven protocol observations are associated with the two dimensions - "Maintaining On-Task Behavior" and "Warmth". For the former dimension, "Maintaining On-Task Behavior", there were a possible five behaviors each of the six teachers could have identified for a total possible of thirty identifications. Their responses indicated fourteen of the possible thirty incidents of behaviors occurring in their classes with the first behavior "a" - behavioral warnings, alertings, criticisms - being identified by all six teachers. During my eleven 25 minute classroom observations, I noted fifteen incidents of this type. Another frequently cited behavior for "Maintaining On-Task Behavior" was behavior "b" - accountability messages. Four out of six teachers indentified it as occurring in their worst class and I observed six incidents of it during eleven observations. One teacher very clearly identified the problems she

encountered in maintaining on-task behavior. She wrote

> "Most of the time this class came into the room yelling and hitting each other. They were extremely difficult to get settled down in order to begin class. They had to be kept busy almost every minute or else they would be out of thier seats and pestering each other. Several times a student even went out the window."

"Maintaining On-Task Behavior" was one of the two dimensions cited by both teacher evaluations and my eleven protocol observations as occurring at the highest frequency. The other dimension cited by both sources was "Warmth". The opening vignette from this protocol of a low level Biology class identifies some of those less effective behaviors:

> "The teacher is writing up a referral on one student while she firmly signals to a group in the back to be quiet. One boy raises his hand. The teacher calls 'Dan? Tom? What's your name, boy?' She says to him 'Look at the tree in the book.' The boy says 'It's a bald cedar.' Teacher says 'What are you, a forest ranger?' The boy says 'Looks like it has leaves to me.' The teacher then asks 'What causes dirt to be washed away?' The same boy says 'Erosion?' The teacher looks amazed and says 'Are you sure you belong in this class?'

There were many types of less effective behaviors associated with the dimension of "Warmth" other than the sarcasm illustrated here. However, of 31 identifications of less effective "Warmth" behaviors noted during the elevel observations I made, over half, seventeen of them, were incidents of teacher sarcasm. The next highest noted behavior was scolding, which was noted six times during my eleven observations. Three out of six teachers identified the less effective behaviors of the "Warmth" dimension citing various verbal responses to situations that arose. One teacher summed it up like this: "I tried being patient and understanding with them. I yelled and screamed at them. I also tried complimenting them on those rare days that their behavior warranted it. To be honest, after six months of trying to find a way to handle them, I just quit worrying with (sic) them."

Finally, through my eleven observations, I also noted an extremely high frequency of the less effective behaviors associated with creating a "Task-Oriented/Business-Like Environment" occurring. During eleven 25-minute observations, I noted 32 instances of these behaviors. There were many examples of classrooms that were so flexible that it was the students who determined the (flow) pace as well as the beginning and ending of activities. The following protocol excerpt illustrates this well:

> The teacher stands in front of the class, book in hand, ready to begin, and says to one student "This is not time to write notes." Another student says "Let me leave this book here." Teacher says "No, it's not a locker room." Student - "It smells like a locker room." Another student - as she looks out the window - "What are seniors doing here?" Teacher says "Stay in school and you'll find out when you're a senior." Above the din of everyone else the teacher asks a group "You guys finished (talking)? Danny's going to give us the answer." No answer is given. Instead, Danny throws a paper into the wastebasket while taking a jumpshot and then gives the "V" sign with both hands to the class. The teacher sarcastically asks "Did you get it in?" Danny says "Yeah, of course." Another student is counting out loud as the teacher again tries to get started above that noise. This time Mark asks "Who teaches English 10?" Another student says "Mrs. K." A third student says "That old woman?" The teacher says "She's not old. We're ready to go over the answers, if you'd settle down. Lisa, give the first answer." Lisa is knitting while giving the answer. The teacher says "People, the increase on the bottom was..." Danny interrupts with "Gotcha" which he sarcastically states while not even looking at any work. The teacher concludes with "We're going to move on, since you've all gotten this so well!"

It is clearly the students, not the teacher, who is dictating the realms of this classroom environment.

Thus, we can conclude that less effective teaching behaviors do occur in those classes identified by a teacher as his/her "worst class". Both teacher self-analysis critiques as well as classroom observations identified two behaviors of Graham and Heinerer's ten dimensions as occurring in high frequency. Those were the less effective teaching behaviors associated

with "Maintaining On-Task Behavior" as well as "Warmth". Furthermore, teachers self-analysis critiques identified the less effective behaviors associated with "Teacher Expectancy" as a high frequency rate and observation of eleven classes identified less effective behaviors associated with a "Task Oriented/Business-Like Environment" being frequently noted.

Questions to be pursued by future research would be, "Are these less effective behaviors unique to a teacher's 'worst' class?" Through observation of a teacher's "best" and "worst" class, a contrast could be made. To continue with this research, I would observe the best classes of each of these same seven teachers to see to what degree these less effective behaviors are being demonstrated, if at all, in those classes one might also then pursue the question of whether or not those behaviors are demonstrated in response to an environment created by other than teacher factors. Finally, during a time in which evaluation procedures through the country are being scrutnized, one would like to pursue to what extent both less effective and more effective behaviors are actually addressed.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Stan Dropkin, "Twin Dimensions of Teacher Behavior Assessment" Contemporay Ed., Vol. 44 (January, 1973), p. 143.

[2]Ibid, p. 144.

[3]R. S. Soar, D.M. Medley and H. Coker, "Teacher Evaluation: A Critique of Currently Used Methods", Phi Delta Kappan, (1983), 241.

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